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## THE HEBREW IDEA OF HOLINESS.

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WORDS of the same root as the Hebrew קדש (*kdš*), "holy," were in use among all the Semitic peoples, denoting a peculiar property of deity, or of persons or things consecrated to the deity, or of customs governing the relations of men to the deity. So the Phœnicians spoke of the "holy gods," and we find among the Syrians persons consecrated to the gods designated as "holy ones." Holiness, in the sense in which it was used by the Semitic peoples, is that which especially belongs to the gods—their divinity. Holiness, on the part of men or things, is a consecration to the service of the deity. Now the intercourse of gods and men is subject to certain limitations, dependent upon the nature of the deity; for the deity is different from man, and one deity is different from another deity. It is in this difference, in this peculiarity of the deity, that his individuality, his holiness, consists. To have relations with a deity, his characteristics, his nature, his holiness, must be taken into consideration. A violation of the rules of his holiness, whether voluntary or involuntary, is liable to be followed by dire consequences for the unfortunate individual who has violated these rules. To have communication with the deity, a man must, as it were, be unclothed from his own customs and usages and clothed upon with those of the deity. He must put away the common and put on that which is holy, which belongs to the nature of this deity and is in accordance with his peculiar laws. Primarily there is nothing ethical in this holiness, and indeed it may even be immoral, as in the case of the hierodules, or "holy" prostitutes, of the Canaanitish shrines.

The first mention, chronologically, of the holiness idea in the

Old Testament is in 1 Sam. 6:20. The ark of Yahweh<sup>1</sup> had been left at Beth-shemesh. The men of that place looked into the ark, wherefore the people were smitten with a great slaughter. "And the men of Beth-shemesh said, Who is able to stand before Yahweh, this holy God?" The holiness of God had been infringed. In looking into the ark they had sought to pry into the mysteries of his nature, that is, his holiness. He exhibited his holiness, his divinity or divine power, by the slaughter which ensued.

The earliest mention of holiness in the legislative enactments of the Hebrews occurs in Ex. 22:31, in the code of laws now commonly known as the book of the covenant (Ex., chaps. 20-23). The Israelites are to be holy men unto God, therefore they shall not eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field. Here holiness is connected, not with a distinctly moral idea, but with what seems to us a law of physical cleanness. I presume that in reality this provision stands on the same footing with the regulations which we find in Lev., chap. 17, where the blood of wild animals, slain in the hunt, must be covered up with earth, so that it shall not become an offering to the demons of the field. To eat the flesh of animals killed by wild beasts is to partake, involuntarily, in the worship of creatures sacrificed to other gods or demons. The Israelite might eat only that of which the blood was given to Yahweh, and which was thus sacrificed to him. Hence this law was not primarily a law of physical cleanness, but a law intended to prevent any relation of the Israelites with demons and evil spirits. The earliest of the prophets whose writings have come down to us, Amos, shows us the common conception of the land of Israel as consecrated to Yahweh. He pronounces upon Amaziah, priest of Bethel, the punishment of death in a land that is unclean. This is only a statement on the positive side of that which is stated on the negative side in 1 Sam. 26:19, where David complains that he is driven out of

<sup>1</sup> With regard to the spelling of the name "Jehovah," I should prefer Yahaweh as better securing the correct pronunciation, for in the more common Yahweh the medial shewa falls out altogether. Most exactly to represent the name, I should write Yáhaweh.

the inheritance of Yahweh and compelled to serve other gods. He could serve Yahweh only in the land which belongs to Yahweh. The same idea appears in 2 Kings 5:17. Naaman asks for "two mules' burden of earth." He intends thereafter to "offer neither burnt-offerings nor sacrifice unto other gods but unto Yahweh". But to offer sacrifice unto Yahweh, he must do it upon the land which belongs to or is holy or peculiar to Yahweh, namely, the land of Israel. Hence the request for two mules' burden of that land upon which to erect an altar to Yahweh. Hosea calls the land of Israel Yahweh's land (Hos. 9:3). All other lands and the things which they contain are unclean, and one of the horrors of the exile which he foresees is that, being driven out of Yahweh's land, they will be compelled to eat unclean food. Only in Yahweh's land can food be consecrated to Yahweh, and only such food is clean. The food in other lands belongs to the gods of those lands, and is therefore unclean to the people of Yahweh.

But it is with Isaiah that the use of the word "holy" in relation to Yahweh becomes especially prominent. So in the sixth chapter of Isaiah, in which he describes the vision that made him a prophet, the song of the seraphim is, "Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh Sebaoth." A common designation of God with him is "the Holy One of Israel," as in Isa. 1:4; 5:19, etc. Not only is this title used freely by him, it is used also by those other writers of later dates whose writings are bound up with those of Isaiah, constituting one volume under that title, which we might well call the "Writings of Isaiah and the School of Isaiah."

But Isaiah gives a new and distinctly ethical sense to the conception of holiness. To him the essence, the nature of God is moral. Consequently, the holiness of which he thinks, inasmuch as it is the divinity, the nature of God, must consist in moral attributes. This is well shown in the first passage in which the phrase "Holy One of Israel" occurs in Isaiah, namely, Isa. 1:4. The people "have forsaken Yahweh; they have despised the Holy One of Israel;" they are "a seed of evil-doers, children that deal corruptly." There has been no lack of sacrifice, of burnt-offerings of rams and bullocks. The new moon and

sabbath and appointed feasts have been celebrated ; prayers and ceremonies have not been wanting. But they have offended the holiness of God, because they have been guilty of moral abominations.

The book of Deuteronomy takes over from Isaiah and his school the free use of the word "holy," but, while an ethical element is not lacking in the deuteronomic idea of holiness, the stress seems to be laid on the external or ceremonial side, as in the passage from the book of the covenant (Ex. 22:31) cited above. So in Deut. 14:1, 2, the Israelites are forbidden to cut themselves or "make any baldness between their eyes for the dead," because Israel is a holy people unto Yahweh, for Yahweh has chosen Israel to be a peculiar people unto himself, out of all peoples that are on the face of the earth. Now, this command lays the stress on ceremonial observance, but the object is ethical, so far as monotheism and the worship of Yahweh are ethical. Cutting themselves and making a "baldness between their eyes for the dead" are forbidden, because they are connected with the worship of other gods ; hence they are a violation of the holiness, the exclusiveness of the worship of Yahweh. It is on the same principle that magic is forbidden, and that the worship of Yahweh at the high places is forbidden. Magic is in reality the service of demons, and the recognition of other gods than Yahweh. And as for the high places, the worship there, as Hosea taught, although under the name of Yahweh-worship, yet was inextricably connected in its rites and ceremonies with the worship of the *ba'alim*, the ancient gods of the lands. Hence those high places were an infringement of the holiness, which is again the exclusiveness, of God.

In this same fourteenth chapter of Deuteronomy we have the law of clean and of unclean beasts. Here again the fundamental, underlying principle is not that of physical cleanness, or of hygienic reasons, but of the exclusive worship of Yahweh. The swine, the mouse, the hare, and the cony (rock-badger) are prohibited, because they were eaten in connection with the worship of other gods. For an Israelite to partake of them is to connect himself with such false worship, and to offend the

holiness, that is, the exclusive divinity, of the one true God. For the same reason, while "the stranger that is within his gates" or the foreigner may partake of that which "dieth of itself," the Israelite may not, since the manner of its death may connect it with some demon, or some divinity other than Yahweh. This almost over-scrupulousness with regard to a possible connection with other deities or supernatural agencies than Yahweh is developed much further in the priestly legislation, and reaches its extreme limits in the post-biblical, pharisaic interpretation of the law. Commencing with an ethical foundation, as a means of banishing polytheism and the moral evils resulting therefrom, it becomes ultimately, after monotheism has been securely established, merely external and ceremonial.

It will be observed, then, that these ceremonial rules in Deuteronomy have a distinctly moral character, in that they aim at the establishment of the worship of Yahweh only, who is a moral God, holy in our sense of the term. This object of the laws of Deuteronomy is clearly set forth in what may be called the motto of that book: "Hear, O Israel, Yahweh our God is one Yahweh; and thou shalt love Yahweh thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (Deut. 6:4, 5). The twenty-sixth chapter, which ends the legislation of Deuteronomy, closes with a statement of the relation of Yahweh and his people. These are Yahweh's statutes and judgments. Israel has avowed Yahweh as its God, and hence has accepted these statutes and judgments, and Yahweh has chosen Israel to be a peculiar people, high above all nations, and a holy people unto Yahweh.

Jeremiah does not make use of the term *holy* or *holiness* as his predecessor Isaiah did, or as the lawbook of his day, Deuteronomy, did. He is distinctly anti-ritualistic; his concern is only with the moral side of things; but, like Deuteronomy, he recognizes the need of one place of worship only. The worship and ritual of the high places, although nominally directed toward Yahweh, has been in reality a worship of the *ba'alim*, and an offense against the exclusive deity of Yahweh, and so he

declares that Israel defiled the land which was holy to Yahweh by following after *ba'alim* (Jer. 2:23).

There is, it will be observed, in all these conceptions of holiness a sense of exclusiveness. Indeed, this is involved in the monotheistic conception of the deity. It is this idea of exclusiveness as such which is peculiarly developed in what is now commonly called the law of holiness (Lev., chaps. 17-26). This is a code of laws of earlier date than the priestly code, into which, according to the present prevailing opinion, it was incorporated by a later writing. In its incorporation into that code and the great lawbook it has undergone some changes, involving excisions, additions, and rearrangement. Critics are of opinion that some fragments of this law of holiness are to be found elsewhere in Leviticus, Exodus, and Numbers, but at least the bulk of the code is contained in Lev., chaps. 17-26, and hence these chapters as a whole have received the title "law of holiness." This code, the law of holiness, is, however, itself based upon earlier codes, some of which, at least, were in the form of decalogues that were expansions and applications of the original decalogue of Ex., chap. 20. We have, in fact, in the law of holiness a final codification of traditions and usages of the Jerusalem temple, moral, ritual, and ecclesiastical, going back to a very early date. This code lays the greatest "stress on ritual correctness and endeavors, with anxious care, to secure the ceremonial purity of the Israelites."<sup>2</sup> From the point of view of that code, this is holiness. It must not be understood that moral laws are wanting in the law of holiness. As already stated, moral, ceremonial, and ecclesiastical laws are here combined in one whole, but all are placed on the same footing and regarded from the same point of view, namely, the holiness, that is, the exclusiveness, of Yahweh. He alone may be worshiped, and in accordance only with those methods and rites which belong to him. The people is exhorted to be holy, because "I, Yahweh your God, am holy" (Lev. 19:2). "Ye shall be holy unto me, for I, Yahweh, am holy and have separated you from the peoples that ye should be mine" (Lev. 20:26). The priest shall be holy unto

<sup>2</sup> ADDIS, *Documents of the Hexateuch*, Vol. II, p. 173.

them, because he offers the bread of God, and God is holy (Lev. 21:8). Over and over again occurs the phrase: "I am Yahweh who maketh you holy." Moral and ritual laws are placed on the same footing, and any breach of any of these laws of any description is counted a profanation of the name of Yahweh. So in Lev. 18:21 the sacrifice of their children to Molech is spoken of as a profanation of the name of Yahweh; and in Lev. 22:2 the same language is used with regard to physical, and even accidental, contact with holy things.

Ezekiel treats the holiness of God in a similar spirit. To him the land of Israel is a land holy, that is, peculiar to Yahweh. All the other lands are unclean (Lev. 4:13). Yahweh is the only God, and yet there is only one land and one people which is holy to him. He only may be worshiped by the Jews, and only according to the laws and rites peculiar to him. The violation of moral laws and the violation of ceremonial laws were alike a profanation of his holiness, for Ezekiel combines the two, as does the law of holiness. Yahweh's holy land Israel had profaned. They had been guilty of idolatry, constantly and persistently. To worship any other god upon the soil of Israel, which was holy to Yahweh, was to profane that soil, and Ezekiel regards all worship of Yahweh at high places as, in fact, worship of other gods. So long as Yahweh continued in that land and dwelt in the holy of holies in the midst of his holy city, that city and his temple were inviolable, for he is almighty. But finally he left the land which had been so wickedly profaned, and withdrew from his earthly abode. The temple was destroyed, because Yahweh no longer dwelt in it; the land was laid waste and the people carried captive. By the removal of his people and the fallowness of his land, Yahweh has purified it of its uncleanness. Now Yahweh would manifest his holiness in delivering a purified remnant of his people and restoring them to his holy land. It is necessary that he and he only shall be worshiped in that land, in the place which he has appointed, and in the manner he has ordained; and so Ezekiel closes his book with a picture of the temple and its ritual, and the relation thereto of priests, prophets, and people.



Ezekiel and the law of holiness in its final form are practically contemporary. To our minds it seems as though, while both recognize the moral exaltation of Yahweh, both laid the stress in the matter of holiness on the outward or ceremonial, rather than on the moral, side—on life and character; and in this consists their similarity. But besides the idea of exclusiveness in the holiness of Yahweh, which is so characteristic of the law of holiness, Ezekiel makes prominent, also, the conception of might. This may be said to follow logically from the idea of exclusiveness and of monotheism connected with it. If there is but one God, who is the maker and ruler of all things, then his is the power and the might over all things. This idea of might Ezekiel emphasizes, but the way in which he represents this one holy God as manifesting that might is closely connected with the idea of holiness as the exclusion or the destruction of all sin and uncleanness. God manifests his holiness in punishing sin and destroying sinners, and in delivering his sanctified people from all their enemies. This idea of the holiness of God in the destruction of all the enemies of Israel and the purification of the holy land Ezekiel seems to carry even beyond the bounds of morality in his picture of the destruction of Gog (Ezek. 38 : 16, 23). The same conception of the holiness of God as consisting above all in the rescue of his people through the destruction of the heathen shows itself in various hymns and psalms of this period and later (*cf.* Ex. 15 : 11).

Closely connected with this thought of the holiness of God, as showing itself in his omnipotence and in his deliverance of Israel from its enemies, is the usage of the later writers of the Isaianic school, some of them contemporaries and fellow-exiles of Ezekiel. In the fortieth and following chapters of Isaiah we find God spoken of as the Holy One of Israel almost, if not quite, as frequently as in the prophecies of Isaiah of Jerusalem. But here this holiness does not show itself, as there, in the moral purity and exaltation of God, and his abhorrence and punishment of sin, but in his omnipotence as displayed in the redemption of Israel, and his wonderful love toward his people. "To whom then will ye liken me, that I should be equal to him?

saith the Holy One" (Isa. 40 : 25). "Thus saith Yahweh, the redeemer of Israel, his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers : Kings shall see and arise ; princes, and they shall worship ; because of Yahweh that is faithful, even the Holy One of Israel, who hath chosen thee" (Isa. 49 : 7).

In three of the Psalms we find the exact phraseology of the Isaianic school, "the Holy One of Israel," used, and connected in two cases with the same idea of the deliverance of Israel which we find in the exilic prophecies of that school (Ps. 71 : 22 ; 89 : 18). In the third case (Ps. 78 : 44) the use is more like the ethical use which we observed in the Isaiah of Jerusalem. "The Holy One" is provoked by the sins of Israel. Elsewhere in the Psalms we find the holiness idea prominent, but without the exact phraseology of the Isaianic school. The best example is Ps. 99, which is *par excellence* the holiness psalm. Here we have three stanzas, the first two of which close with the refrain, "Holy is He," while the last ends, "For Yahweh our God is holy." His holiness in this psalm is in part his great and terrible power, reminding us of the earliest use of the term "holiness" (1 Sam. 6 : 20); and in part the semi-ethical, semi-ceremonial holiness of the legal codes, only with the ethical side more clearly expressed. This God establishes righteousness, and pleasing to him are those who observe his testimonies and his statutes. Throughout the later literature the holiness idea is prominent in one form or another. In Job 6 : 10 we have "the Holy One" used as the name of God, as in the writings of the Isaianic school. Here the conception seems to be the ethical one, of the God who is too holy to endure sin and who must hence punish the evil-doer. In Prov. 9 : 10 we have the same ethical use of the term "Holy One," for which, by the way, for the first time, the plural is used in the Hebrew instead of the singular. But in general the exclusive idea is prominent in the use of holiness in these late writings. So in Isa. 62 : 12 the Jews are the holy people, and in Isa. 64 : 9 their cities are called God's "holy cities." In Ezra 9 : 2 "the holy seed have mingled themselves with the peoples of the lands." In the latest of our canonical Old

Testament books, Daniel, we read of the saints (holy ones) of the Most High (Dan. 19:18)—that is, faithful Jews; and in Dan. 8:20 the Jews are called the “holy people.”

There is only one Holy One in the world, and he has but one holy people, and so Israel is exalted over all the peoples of the world, and it is the duty of Israel to maintain itself as the people of the only true God, the Holy One of Israel, making itself holy by excluding and avoiding everything that is unholy. This is the attitude of the priestly code, that codification of moral, ceremonial, and ecclesiastical laws which included within itself, as already stated, the law of holiness (Lev., chaps. 17–26). As a code this is the work of the priestly scribes of the exilic and post-exilic periods, based, of course, on older material, and taking its final form, for all practical purposes at least, toward the close of the fifth century before Christ. Ezekiel, in his representation of the true Israel (Ezek., chaps. 40–48), had made the sharp distinction of holy and common an essential element of the conception. Ezra’s lawbook carries that conception farther, if possible; certainly into much greater detail. I cannot better explain the view of holy and common therein contained than by a quotation from Dr. Cheyne: “To understand Ezra’s lawbook it is necessary to realize its object. This was not to cultivate a lofty type of personal piety, but to guard against a recurrence of the great national calamity of the past. The old religion of Israel, with all its attractive variety of local and family rites, had proved itself inadequate. The presence of the divine king among his people had been continually interrupted. Tyrants had often usurped the dominion, for how could a God be said to rule in a conquered or even in a tributary land? and there had also been a permanent obscuration of the theocracy by the institution of a human royalty. Hence the necessity of a perfect divine law to which priests and laymen, rich and poor, should be equally subject—a law which should take into account the huge difference between God and man, and should spare no pains in determining the points in which a supernatural God would be necessarily offended—*i. e.*, in marking the limits between the holy and the unholy, the sacred and the profane. And since the primitive

confusion of the material and the ethical was not yet overcome, and since it was vastly easier to deal with material than with ethical violations of the divine sanctity, it came to pass that the main subject of the Jewish as well as of the Zoroastrian law was the distinction between clean and unclean, and the manner in which lost ceremonial purity could be recovered. It was only those who were technically clean who could appear before God, and the object of the elaborate sacrificial system was not to produce peace of mind for the individual, but to unify the community on a sound religious basis, maintaining its consecrated character unimpaired. The individual who voluntarily or involuntarily transgressed any precept of the law injured the sanctity of the community. As long, therefore, as his transgression was unatoned for, he was a source of danger to that organic whole of which he was a member. It mattered not whether the precept were moral or ritual, the divine holiness had been wronged, and satisfaction had to be given, either by ceremonial means or by the cutting off of the offending branch from the parent stem."<sup>3</sup>

There is, of course, a high moral character in this code, but, on the other hand, the ceremonial enactments appear to stand (and in the interpretation of the law they ultimately came to stand) on the same footing as the moral. Sin, and God's abhorrence of sin, and the sinfulness of men are emphasized, but we find that sin is not always the result of intention on man's part. The inadvertent touching of an unclean thing, something of which he is not himself conscious, may render him unholy, provoke the wrath of God, and bring calamity upon him, or even upon the whole nation (Lev., chaps. 4, 5).

The later development of Judaism was along these same lines, with an ever-increasing externalism and ceremonialism for the sake of ceremony. Holiness tended constantly more and more to become a thing of the proper observance of forms. The ceremonialism of the earlier laws has, as we have seen, an ethical basis. The laws of clean and unclean, the prohibition of tattooing, hair-cutting in mourning for the dead, and the like, were not in their origin mere ceremonial laws. They were intended to

<sup>3</sup> CHEYNE, *Jewish Religious Life after the Exile*, pp. 73, 74.

prevent polytheism and a false worship which was to no small extent immoral and debasing. To assure the holiness of Israel, Israel must be made to refrain from these things. Hence the laws forbidding such practices. But the day came when the danger of polytheism was past forever, when the reason for the prohibition of the swine and the mouse, of tattooing and hair-cutting, no longer existed, and even the cause why these things were forbidden had been forgotten. But the laws still continued to be observed, and even to be sharpened and strengthened. There was no longer any reason for their existence. Their ethical value in the promotion of true holiness had vanished. Henceforth they were without meaning in themselves, and their "holiness" was a hollow formalism. That is the condition which was reached by later Judaism. Ceremonial laws, which had long since lost their real significance, were maintained and developed into a constantly more elaborate and artificial system in the interests of what had become a selfish exclusivism. Holiness came to mean the observance of this system and the maintenance of this exclusivism. It is true, nevertheless, that physical cleanliness, in the ritual, not the actual sense, was regarded mystically as a representation, or even as a *sacrament*, of spiritual holiness; and there were also individuals who interpreted holiness in the high ethical sense of an Isaiah, and understood the law in its highest and most spiritual significance; but we are speaking of the system as a whole, and of what holiness commonly meant, let us say in the time of our Lord, and the centuries that succeeded.

Such, in brief, is the history of the holiness idea from its origination in the belief in the peculiar nature of the god or gods, common to the Hebrews with the nations about them, to its culmination in the conception of one God, righteous and omnipotent, and its decline in later Judaism to a system of ceremonialism.